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The clever American

THE CRAFT OF INTELLIGENCE by Allen Dulles (Weidenfeld & Nicolson 30s).
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THE Central Intelligence Agency is an openly acknowledged arm of the U.S. Executive, but the fact that most of its duties are of necessity secret qualifies it eminently for the role of scapegoat in the minds of many well-meaning people alarmed by the dangerous state of our imperfect world.

Once it was the armament manufacturers who were to blame for everything: rather more recently it was Allen Dulles, until the end of 1961 Director of C.I.A. and a master-craftsman in the trade of intelligence and counter-espionage. Of course it was inevitable that to Communists he should be a vicious, reactionary, war-mongering gangster and war criminal: but it was depressing that a great many people here who should have known better were only too ready to take the same line.

I'd like to think that they will all read this excellent book attentively, and from it learn a little more about the nature of the world as it is. But no doubt there will always be plenty of ostentatiously liberal-minded ostriches to resent and reject the idea that a free and open society on the defensive against a closed and fundamentally aggressive society must undertake a great deal of risky clandestine work

in the preservation of peace and freedom.

Mr Dulles obviously does not hold the view that intelligence should be taboo as a subject: on the contrary, he says, an efficient service about which as much as possible is as widely known as possible is in itself a strong deterrent to subversion. Hence his lively, absorbing, and convincing defence of his old trade, in which he somehow contrives to tell a great deal without giving anything away.

No society has a greater hatred of governmental secrecy than that of the United States, and it took the pressures of the Cold War to bring into being an intricately organised and co-ordinated permanent service. The C.I.A. as it now is is largely the creation of Mr Dulles. Considering the years in which he stood up to be shot at, as a bogymen by the Left and as a monster of incompetence by the Right, he is remarkably calm and good-humoured. His book in fact has a high entertainment value: and although he is at pains to point out that the life of an intelligence officer is more boffin-like than Bond's, the accounts none the less convey a powerful sense of high human and technical drama behind the scenes.

Much of the C.I.A.'s counter-espionage work is cancelled out by the extraordinary openness of American government. Mr Dulles

tells of a demonstrative exercise in which a task force of academics, working only on published and generally available material, produced an analysis of American power so accurate in detail that it had to be classified as top secret. He envies Britain the concept of Crown privilege and the velvet-glove convention by which the "voluntary" D-notice system keeps awkward revelations out of the Press. About our shortcomings, as he sees them, he is reticent, observing only in passing that our practices in selecting and supervising personnel in sensitive posts "leave a good deal to be desired."

But I find him most compelling when he is considering the philosophy and role of intelligence in a free society committed to defend its liberties, and its allies, against a basically conspiratorial system which is still, though more cautiously, committed to the idea of world domination by subversion. These above all are the chapters which ought to be read more than once by the sensitive souls who are quick, when the going is rough, to see the United States as just another nuisance like the U.S.S.R., and if anything rather more dangerous.

Some odd notions spread out from such books as "The Ugly American" and "The Quiet American." Mr Dulles, as "The Clever American," provides a good antidote.